

# CANADA

AND ITS RELATIONS TO  
THE BRITISH EMPIRE

## AN ADDRESS

BY

SIR J. W. FLAVELLE, BT.

*Chairman of the Imperial Munitions Board, Canada*

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*An Address delivered at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto,  
by Sir J. W. Flavelle, Bart., on April 27th, 1917.*

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MR. CHAIRMAN :

It will be agreed that there is a widespread feeling in the Overseas Dominions and in Great Britain and Ireland that our mutual relations within the Empire must undergo a change in the reconstruction period following the war. There will not be the same agreement as to what the changes should be. We all know there are wide differences of opinion as to what should be done, as there may well be in a matter of such grave importance. There is an important body of opinion which is unsettled rather than informed, and which is discovering itself, at least to the extent that it is inquiring what the problem is and what are the suggested alternatives for its solution.

Permit me to ask—Have you reached a clear belief that the Empire should continue? Do you consider it has life which is so vital as a great civilizing force that you refuse to contemplate the world being deprived of its benefits? Does it represent to you power and usefulness and efficiency in unselfish service, and have you grown into a conviction that it possesses such abiding value to those who are within it, and to the world outside, that its members should perpetuate it in an indissoluble

union? Or have you thought of it as something that only *may* continue, that it is probably a passing development which will naturally break up into its constituent parts later, and that the possibility of such a result does not disturb you?

Do you consider an autonomous Canada within the Empire our destiny? Or do you think the destiny of Canada ultimately is independence, or that measure of independence in which we will take care of ourselves and, untrammelled by definite obligations to others, exercise free choice as to our actions in foreign affairs?

Many among us hitherto have not thought it necessary to ask these questions. We do not desire to face the alternatives or to be forced into these positions. And yet I believe you have here the marrow of the matter. The determination which may shortly be reached in the councils of these nations will determine, I believe, consciously or unconsciously, whether this Commonwealth will abide. Therefore, it seems to me we should give diligence to the inquiry:—Is this Empire worth saving as a permanent force in human affairs?

This thing we call Empire or Commonwealth: this connection between Great Britain and the Overseas Dominions: the standards of British fair play and liberty and justice which have come to us through these associations—had grown to mean so much to us that, when the call came in 1914, we did not stop to reason, or argue, or question, or ask what others would do; but instinctively, unhesitatingly, spontaneously, in common with all the other members of this family of nations, we offered and supplied men and material and money. In common with all the others, we have undertaken burdens ungrudgingly, which, if we had been asked, previous to the war, could we or would we bear, we would have answered—*Impossible*.

In the doing of these things we have discovered we are doing them, chiefly, not to help England—much as she deserves our help—but in response to a deep instinct which called on us to play our part in defence of the right as we have learned it



during this century of association with the other Dominions and Great Britain. We have found that we had travelled a much longer way in idealism than we realized.

Is this instinct to bear the burdens of others natural to intense Nationalism, or is it the outcome of the development which we call Materialism ?

We have thought that Nationalism in our French-Canadian compatriots is what has beclouded their vision to a call to duty wider than domestic considerations. Is there a call to some of us who find fault with the French-Canadian to be careful that we are not possessed of the same spirit, though differing in expression ?

Is not this British conception of a Commonwealth founded upon liberty and justice and the bearing of responsibility and the fulfilling of duty, instinctively undertaking burdens for others as well as instinctively taking care of itself, the thing which will keep alive the soul of this rapidly developing nation which is growing rich in material things ? Can we explain the part Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Newfoundland, the Isles of the Sea, India, have borne in this war upon any other hypothesis ? We could gain no lands, and receive no indemnity, and yet, with pride, we have sacrificed the flower of our young manhood ; have incurred a national debt of staggering proportions ; and yet the call of our people is not *Do Less*, but *Do More* !

It is the knowledge we have played a man's part, and have borne a man's burden, and have not been afraid to die for a great cause which has brought to us a new consciousness, and we say, as do the other Overseas Nations, we must share in council ; we must share in responsibility, and claim the right of full citizenship to shape the policy out of which the responsibility grows. If we are to fight, and spend, and be spent, we must discover a means whereby, both as to the cause for which we fight and the cost of the undertaking, we share responsibility with those with whom we are associated.

I believe we have not faced the situation when we say : "Let well enough alone ; our relations have served us hitherto, why bother with them now ?" Does anyone suppose that these nations which have shared in this struggle will rest content to have Houses of Parliament representing only people in Great Britain determine for us these matters of peace and war and our relations with other peoples. I cannot but think that men who say this say it, not so much from conviction based upon a consideration of present conditions, as from fear that, if the problem is fairly and resolutely faced, conclusions may be reached which may make necessary the re-casting of the views they have long held.

After Mr. Lloyd George returned from the Allied Conference at Rome, he said : "There was one thing that struck me and that strikes me more and more each time I attend these conferences and visit the Continent—I mean the increasing extent to which the Allied peoples are looking to Great Britain. They are trusting her rugged strength and great resources more and more. She is to them like a great tower in the deep. She is becoming more and more the hope of the oppressed and the despair of the oppressor. And I feel confident that we shall not fail the people who have put their trust in us."

Here is the way in which an American, George Burton Adams, is impressed with our efforts towards Imperial Unity. Writing of Imperial Federation after the war in the "Yale Review," he states : "Yet from a distance we can see and because of our distance with good right we may judge, that these are high attempts, as lofty political conceptions as any which mankind has yet tried to make real with hope of success. We can see also that if success is reached in this endeavour, there will have been achieved the utmost which is possible to present conditions in the realization, security and extension of liberty for all the world. For these are the objects of this attempt. The future student of this age will be sure that one of the most striking changes of the last hundred years has been the awakening of the political conscience of the Anglo-Saxon



race. It has come to see, with constantly increasing clearness, that Empire has no right to be as mere dominion, or power, or exploitation, but that its only defence is to be found in the bearing of responsibility and the fulfilling of duty ; that Empire is a method of holding liberty and the institutions of self-government in trust, until the destined heirs of the inheritance reach their majority."

I go back to a much older document—I venture to think the quotation is not inappropriate. "Art thou He that should come or do we look for another?" was the pointed question sent by the man of the desert who chafed in prison. "Go and show John again," came the reply, "those things which ye do hear and see—the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

May I present in contrast the vainglorious standards of an extreme Nationalism—"Ye have heard how in old times it was said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, but I say unto you, Blessed are the valiant for they shall make the earth their throne. And ye have heard men say, Blessed are the poor in spirit, but I say unto you, Blessed are the great in soul and the free in spirit, for they shall enter Valhalla."

"And ye have heard men say, Blessed are the peace makers, but I say unto you Blessed are the war makers, for they shall be called, if not the children of Jah, the children of Odin, who is greater than Jah."

Would you see the fruitage—go to ravished Belgium and stricken Northern France or desolate, thrice desolate, Poland or crushed Serbia.

We occupy our great areas of land with men and women of every nation. We will vie with the world in growing wheat and cattle. We build railways, establish great industrial activities, and we grow rich in this world's goods. We build churches and schools and universities and libraries. In the doing let us be careful to hold to the substance and have the

root of the matter in us. There is sound wisdom in the warning to this young nation, so wonderful in its possibilities, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It is this view of Empire, of the Commonwealth, which attracts me—not dominion or power or exploitation—but the bearing of responsibility and the fulfilling of duty. To me, there is in this no limitation of our national greatness and importance, but rather an open door to service which will enable us to share in the world's burdens and the world's conquests.

In considering the future, we will reach a determination whether we are to adopt a policy of co-operation which the constituent nations within the Empire will voluntarily exercise when a crisis occurs, or whether we are to adopt a policy in which each nation will retain full autonomy in all matters of domestic concern, but will be bound with other similarly autonomous bodies including Great Britain and Ireland, in the determination of our relations with the world outside the Commonwealth.

It is to me relatively a matter of not much consequence, how far we may elect to go in either course at the moment. We will probably choose the wise course and make haste slowly. What does matter is, whether the choice favours a policy or a tendency to voluntary co-operation, or a policy or tendency to co-operation in federation.

The time at my disposal will not permit me to reason the case. I can but state a conviction, which I believe must be reached by careful inquirers, that a policy of voluntary co-operation within the Empire means separation. There would doubtless be many years of continued connection and harmonious association, and after the tie was broken co-operative conditions would frequently recur. The fact is, voluntary co-operation is a contradiction in terms. You cannot have co-operation if those who are to co-operate are at liberty to share or refuse to share as from time to time they may choose. The inevitable result of a relationship in which the members would only support



one another when they elected to do so, is that the relationship as a vital force must cease. To those who say "What of it if it does? It will be the result of our own choice and why hamper it?"—I will only remark that I believe the spiritual power which these Empire relations have brought to us and which will deepen as the Overseas Dominions and Great Britain draw closer together, is the power which will make Canada great in world affairs, and will help to preserve her from selfish insularity and self-centred nationalism.

"And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plains of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. So Lot chose him all the plains of Jordan and Lot journeyed East and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the Land of Canaan and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plains and pitched his tent towards Sodom."

If we have Federation, can we preserve our autonomy, and develop what we term national spirit and yet give sustained allegiance to the Commonwealth in which we are sharers? If we cannot, I want none of it. I will yield no jot or tittle of our autonomy in domestic affairs to any power. But why should we lose autonomy or sound national spirit through Federation? Would we not have all the power we now possess *plus* the power of sharing in the councils and responsibilities of world affairs with a family of nations bound in the Federation? Would you claim that the experience of the past two and one-half years would show that, living within the Empire, we are wanting in national spirit in Canada in contrast to national spirit in the United States, which is a great English-speaking community without the Empire?

Under present conditions we have the obligations incident to domestic autonomy, but we have also obligations incident to membership in the Empire. The blood of our sons in France and Flanders, and the treasures expended, tell us how momentous are the decisions which lay these burdens upon us. And yet we have no voice or part in the circumstances leading up to those decisions.

You ask what sort of representation would we have : you say you consider we should be smothered by Great Britain and Ireland. But why say this ? The representative body, be it a Parliament or a Council, would not be Great Britain's, but *ours*, and in the "ours" are Great Britain and Ireland and Canada and Australia and New Zealand and South Africa, and who knows what others. Do we in Ontario, within this Dominion, say we will not be represented in Parliament at Ottawa because we are in the minority ? When our members go to Ottawa, they do not vote as men from Ontario ; they divide and some join with one group from the other Provinces, and some with another group, and whichever of these groups preponderate in numbers, their opinion holds and governs. If we federate, we will not divide as to countries, but as to policies. Representatives from Canada would differ with one another as would representatives from the other Dominions and Great Britain. These would form combinations, and the determination of the majority would be defined by policy, not by country. Would we let this central Parliament or Council collect money from us ? Why not ? The Parliament or Council which would make the claim upon us would be *ours*. We must rid our minds of the idea that the central Parliament or Council under Federation would be an outside body ; it would be ours as much as Great Britain's, as the Parliament in Ottawa is as much Prince Edward Island's with its 4 members as it is Ontario's with its 86 members.

If Federation comes, the personnel of the membership of the Imperial Parliament from Canada should not ultimately be determined by the Parliament of Canada, whatever may be the earlier steps, but membership should rest on the choice of the people of Canada determined by their votes. For these world affairs, for which we would bear responsibility, are not to be determined by men chosen in some privileged manner. They must represent the people whose choice they are, and thus give to all our people the refining and broadening influence of direct contact with and interest in these world affairs. I am Radical



enough to say—better a poor choice, for which the people are responsible, than a good choice, selected by privilege.

If Federation comes, the struggle and sacrifice will have been Great Britain's, not the Overseas Dominions'. Great Britain would have to surrender what she now possesses—supreme control. The Overseas Dominions would be gainers, holding all they now possess, and in addition securing representation, ever increasing in numbers, in a Parliament which would inherit all the noble traditions of the British Parliament, and which would be charged with the duty of interpreting, in our relations with other nations, those principles of justice and liberty and service which are the pride and honour of our race.

I ask you—Is this not worth while? Will we run away from the problem because its solution presents difficulties, or will we with good courage take it up, and live with it, until we understand its bearings?

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